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ABSTRACT

School districts with surplus space and those wishing to obtain space more economically than by constructing conventional additions will obtain insights from this collection of eight abstracts of references in the ERIC system. (MLF)

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EA 008 614

ALTERNATIVE USES OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS

American school systems are currently faced with several enrollment problems that can occur at a given school in a bewildering variety of combinations. The dropout rate, migration from inner cities to suburbia, and migration from rural to urban areas have been problems for some time. As these factors fluctuate, however, they are now also complicated by a decline in the birthrate, the effects of busing, and a renewed interest among young adults in small community living. The effects of these opposing currents cannot be predicted in general, but, in a large number of school districts across the country, one result will be empty or partially empty school buildings.

There are several possible ways of dealing with these vacated facilities. The school can be closed down and disposed of. Community programs can be invited to share space with the schools under a number of arrangements. Or the school can be maintained as an educational facility providing for needs that have not previously been met. The first two of these three possibilities—closing schools and providing for community facilities—are discussed in other issues in this series. The last—alternative educational uses of school space—is the major topic of this digest.

Unfortunately, little has been written on a subject so clearly due to be a major concern of school districts. Until now, the enrollment decline has been restricted for the most part to elementary schools, and underpopulated older buildings have either been used to alleviate overcrowding at the secondary level or have been disposed of as part of an effort at renewal. When the enrollment decline hits the secondary school population, even more buildings will be freed. But will the decline continue? Should educationally adequate buildings be kept as a safeguard against possible future con-

ALTERNATIVE USES OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS EA 008 614

struction costs?

Whether an alternative use for a vacated building or wing is intended as a permanent change or merely a temporary situation, it is a good idea to consider all the possible benefits. If a building that has become a district resource center proves so valuable that returning it to classroom use can hardly be acceptable and new facilities must be built, can the district be said to have lost? Even if a new school must be added, the district has improved its program by taking advantage of the opportunity of inexpensive space when the chance was there.

It should be recognized as well that even if a school building is closed to further educational use, its conversion to new purposes may serve as an educational enterprise in itself. Students can learn on a very practical level while helping plan for, remodel, and perhaps even staff old schools that become community centers, housing projects, or shopping malls.

Taking full advantage of the possible uses of a school building requires an open mind, imagination, and a thorough understanding of how community and educational needs are changing. The literature on the subject offers general guidelines and hints at the possibilities, but all too often excuses itself from making a more substantial offering on the grounds that every case is different. While a few detailed case studies would go far toward acquainting educators with the complexity of the various types of undertaking, for the present those interested in new uses of old spaces must rely primarily on their own efforts. Despite whether the care and study expended lead to the best possible alternatives, the exercise itself should provide a very important understanding of the school's or district's capacity for meeting the future.

Clinchy, Evans, and others. *Schools: More Space/Less Money. A Report.* New York: Educational Facilities Laboratories, 1971. 85 pages. ED 060 529.

There are many ways in which space can be obtained for school use more economically than by constructing conventional schools or additions. Found space is not restricted to structures outside the school system, but can include outdated or inefficiently used buildings already owned. Corridors, lobbies, auditoriums, and cafeterias are often poorly used, and renovation here can make space available at lower cost than can new construction, especially when open plan arrangements are sought.

Time as well as space can be better used. Opening schools for a full class schedule on an afternoon and evening basis allows one building to do the work of two, while permitting students whose off-campus activities make such a schedule attractive to continue their schooling more easily. The extended school year also allows use of the facility by additional students without substantial cost increases, and provides options for students, teachers, and parents.

The open campus approach raises the school's capacity by cutting back on space needed for study halls. Home-base schools extend this approach by providing for a great deal of learning to take place outside the school walls, thus permitting a building to serve as a base for different groups at different times without having to house all students at once. Some experimental programs, notably in Philadelphia and Chicago, have done away with conventional school buildings altogether and rely instead on other community facilities, both public and private.

The development of resource centers at central locations allows specialized equipment to be used by students from several schools without costly duplications. Space that would otherwise be used to house the equipment in each local school is now available for more efficient use.

New building techniques provide financial savings. The systems approach, fast-tracking, floating schools, domes and air-supported membranes, and the use of open space are all possibilities. Joint occupancy with public or private agencies can also reduce costs while expanding facilities available.

This report concludes with two examples of major complexes that combine several of the above approaches in integrated plans.

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Educational Facilities Laboratories. *Surplus School Space: Options and Opportunities. A Report.* New York: 1976. 75 pages. ED number not yet assigned.

Declining enrollments and migrating populations mean that surplus space will become available in at least some

schools in districts across the nation. On the local school level, empty classrooms offer the possibility of expanding art, music, and science programs, providing space for innovations like reading improvement or alternative schools, and even making room for citizen-sponsored programs. When whole schools become vacant they do not have to be sold or leased. Intermediate education districts may have enough students with special needs to make use of a school the local district cannot fill. Higher education, vocational and career training, and adult instruction in many areas can convert an empty school to valuable educational purposes.

Planning on the district level offers an even greater chance of success than planning school-by-school. The Duval County School Board in Jacksonville, Florida, used 7 of 17 closed schools to meet districtwide goals. After temporary use as a community college, one inner-city building became the district's headquarters, and a second building became the district's curriculum center. Renovation of both facilities came to less than $400,000, whereas under previous conditions minimum rental of office space over a five-year period would have amounted to $625,000, would have meant cramped quarters in a courthouse (which itself needed more space), and would have meant doing without the curriculum center. Four more buildings became storage depots and vocational and career education centers. One last building, large enough to house only 106 students, became a marine science center and laboratory, thanks to an ocean-front location. "Today it is constantly in use. Pupils from all of Jacksonville's elementary schools make at least one annual field trip" to the center, and it is "fully booked for the next three years for visits (on a fee basis) by school groups from outside Jacksonville."

Achieving such results depends on knowing when and where schools will be available, and what educational needs are developing, in advance. Enrollment projections, land use and cost analyses, legal restrictions on building uses, the school's role in maintaining community values, and programs likely to be mandated by government or citizens must all be examined ahead of time and with wide community participation.

A discussion of recent demographic trends and a listing of information sources for the countless examples cited in the text round out this solid basic report, providing a starting place from which those interested can proceed in any of several directions.

Order copies from Educational Facilities Laboratories, Inc., 850 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022. $4.00.
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Graves, Ben E. "The Recycled School." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 56, 5 (January 1975), pp. 341-344. EJ 109 247.

The restructuring of existing buildings at moderate cost can result in much more useful and efficient educational space. The removal of walls, conversion of large and poorly used spaces, and construction of well-planned additions can transform educationally marginal facilities into new and exciting learning centers. This brief overview of the possibilities gives practical examples from simple wall removals to districtwide projects.

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Greenhalgh, John. "Quality Office Space on a Limited Budget." *American School & University*, 47, 12 (August 1975), pp. 26-27. EJ 122 491.

Greenhalgh briefly describes the conversion of a 1916 elementary school into 11,500 square feet of modern office space at a cost of $100,000. Problems encountered were high ceilings, old floors, built-in blackboards, steam radiators, and inadequate wiring. Diagrams indicate options for transforming two standard room plans into five different office suites each.

Hasenpflug, Thomas R. "Planning Educational Facilities: The New Environment." Paper presented at American Management Association conference, New York, August 1972. 12 pages. ED 070 162.

While concentrating on planning for new facilities rather than on finding new uses for existing buildings, Hasenpflug stresses the importance of realizing that the building designed for today's needs will have to serve different needs tomorrow. Taking into account the alternative uses that will eventually be sought for buildings currently being designed helps to assure that flexibility is built-in. In conclusion Hasenpflug notes that flexibility requires product awareness, openness that can be closed, utilization of vertical as well as horizontal space, recognition that a facility may come to house another clientele, and realization of the importance of individualization and self-motivation in education.

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Kelsey, F. Lamar. "Sports Facilities: The New Breed." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 56, 5 (January 1975), pp. 321-325. EJ 109 242.

Kelsey's article concentrates on just one aspect of the school plant, but it is an aspect that has traditionally been inefficiently used—the sports facilities. In a series of sketches of facilities currently in use or under construction, Kelsey emphasizes flexible use of space through special flooring materials, improved use of vertical surfaces, partitions, netting and room dividers, and shared locker facilities capable of year-round use.

Parker, Jack. "One Old Schoolhouse Refuses to Die." *School Management*, 18, 3 (March 1974), pp. 34-35. EJ 094 566.

A program supported mutually by Lehigh County Vocational Technical School and a local nonprofit citizens' group has allowed a closed school building to become a practical laboratory in construction techniques for students with school adjustment problems. In the process of transforming the old building into low-cost apartments for disadvantaged families, the students gain knowledge, pride, and motivation, which are reflected in substantially decreased withdrawal and absentee rates and substantially higher goal accomplishment levels.

Sargent, Cyril G., and Handy, Judith. *Fewer Pupils/Surplus Space. A Report.* New York: Educational Facilities Laboratories, 1974. 55 pages. ED 093 046.

In this comprehensive study of declining enrollment the chapter on "Facility Use" proposes a number of educational uses for buildings that have lost their student bodies. Making space available for newly mandated day-care, kindergarten, vocational, special, and adult education programs is possible when space first becomes available. Full use of school buildings by these programs or by alternative schools is a more satisfactory method of keeping them available for the future than is mothballing.

Providing facilities for dropouts, problem youth, pregnant girls, and even alternative programs of traditional "3 R's" education are some possibilities. Administrative areas, storage space, and centralized location of such services as kitchens, can also be accommodated, as can sections for educational experimentation.

Order copies from Educational Facilities Laboratories, Inc., 850 Third Avenue, New York New York 10022. $4.00.
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